



## ***Romanticism on the Net***

### **“Britain Now Your Voices Join”: The Legacy of Peterloo in Song**

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#### **Abstract**

Whilst the study of song is beginning to appear in work within the field of Romanticism, its performative nature is still largely uncharted territory, in large part due to the challenges in recovering information on the authors, singers and reception of these songs. Published as ephemeral broadsides, songsters, chapbooks or in radical journals, these songs occupy the hinterland between oral and print culture. Through the *Road to Peterloo* project, in which three renowned musicians from the North West recorded and performed a selection of songs published in the immediate aftermath of the massacre, the rightful return to orality of these songs requires reconsideration. Three Peterloo songs are considered in this essay, both in text and performance: the anonymous broadside ballad, “A New Song on Peterloo Meeting,” “Saint Ethelstone’s Day” by the Spencean poet, Allan Davenport, and “Peterloo” by the little-known cotton spinner-poet, John Stafford. Through an examination of these three songs and the contexts in which they were written and performed alongside the significance of the stated tunes, this essay seeks to highlight the significance of song to the wider study of the radical culture of the Romantic period and contribute to the scholarship on Peterloo. Moreover, the songs’ transformation by Coe, Peters and Smyth, which simultaneously pays tribute to the originals whilst enhancing their meaning admirably through their understanding of how these songs can connect with audiences, illustrates that it is only through the mediation of performance that these texts truly come alive.

#### **Biographical Note**

Alison Morgan is an Associate Professor in the Centre for Teacher Education at the University of Warwick. Since the completion of her PhD thesis in 2012 on Shelley’s Peterloo poems, she has

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written a range of journal articles comprising research on Irish elegy, radical British national anthems and the representation of women and children at Peterloo. In 2018, she published *Ballads and Songs of Peterloo* with Manchester University Press and took part in a wide range of events to mark the bicentenary of the massacre in 2019. She continues to research radical song in the Romantic period.

Pete Coe has been a professional folk musician for fifty years, touring home and abroad. He is multi-instrumentalist, songwriter, collector and singer of traditional songs. In 2016 he was awarded a Gold Badge by the English Folk Dance & Song Society for his outstanding contribution to folk music over years of performing, researching, teaching and organising.

Brian Peters is a musician, educator, and researcher from the Manchester area, who has performed in concert and led classes on balladry in Britain, the USA, Canada and Australia. He has published articles on Appalachian versions of British ballads and the broadside history of “The Wild Rover” and is currently researching the history of the Folk Music Revival in England, and industrial broadside songs in the North-West.

Laura Smyth is a qualified librarian and folk musician. After starting her career at Stockport Local Heritage Library, she moved to the English Folk, Dance and Song Society in 2011 and held the post of Library and Archives Director between 2014 and 2020. During this time, she co-delivered on digitisation projects such as *Carpenter Folk Online* (in collaboration with the Elphinstone Institute, and Library of Congress), and oversaw the *Folk Song Subject Index Project*. As a singer and musician, Laura specialises in English folk song with particular emphasis on material from the North West.

## **I. Introduction**

If we have worried about whether the subaltern might speak, we may also consider the ways in which the subaltern [...] *sang*. (McLane 11) [original emphasis]

1. Maureen McLane's use of postcolonial discourse to describe the need to study ballads and songs in literary scholarship incisively brings to the fore the otherness often associated with the largely anonymous or little-known balladeers who have documented the lives of ordinary – and extraordinary – people through the centuries. Whilst some attention has been paid in recent years to the study of song and radical culture, there remains a lack of scholarly attention on broadside ballads and the performative nature of song. Reception within vernacular culture is still largely uncharted territory, in part due to the limited information regarding who sang these songs, as well as where, when and how they were performed and received. Published as broadsides, songsters, chapbooks or in radical journals, these songs are by their very nature evanescent, simultaneously inhabiting both oral and print culture. Researching ephemeral texts from the Romantic era today, it is their positioning within print culture which is foregrounded; nevertheless, it is important not to lose sight of their orality. As Walter Ong aptly observes, “oral expression can exist and mostly has existed without any question at all, writing never without orality” (9). It is that symbiotic relationship between oral and print that is considered here.
2. My own research into the ballads and songs of Peterloo is conducted through the lens of literary scholarship rather than that of a historian or musicologist; however, through collaboration with three renowned musicians, Pete Coe, Brian Peters and Laura Smyth, a

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re-evaluation of the Peterloo songs takes into account how contemporary performances enhance our understanding of the reception and significance of these songs two hundred years ago. Established to form part of the commemorations of the bicentenary of Peterloo in 2019, *The Road to Peterloo* comprises a recording of fifteen radical broadside ballads from the North West by Coe, Peters and Smyth. These situate Peterloo within the wider context of nineteenth-century labouring-class experiences in the North West, with a particular focus on handloom weavers.<sup>1</sup>

3. The three Peterloo songs recorded by *Road to Peterloo* to be considered here are as follows: the anonymous broadside ballad, “A New Song on Peterloo Meeting”; “Saint Ethelstone’s Day” by the Spencean poet Allan Davenport; and “Peterloo” by the little-known weaver-poet, John Stafford.<sup>2</sup> In their work on music and music-making in the long nineteenth century, Kate Bowan and Paul A. Pickering note that “songs themselves are at once agents and vessels of history, both shaping it and containing it” (39). It is indeed the case that the three songs focussed on in this essay fulfil that description: Coe, Peters and Smyth not only transmit authentic historical voices to a new audience but also add their own interpretations to the songs, thereby contributing to the layers of meaning.<sup>3</sup> As Oskar Cox Jensen rightly maintains, “any performance of a song has the capacity to enfold a host of times and places within the moments of its own happening” (545). Through an examination of the context in which the songs were originally written and performed, the significance of the stated tunes, as well as the role played by Stafford’s “Peterloo” in the commemoration of the massacre by the Chartists, this essay seeks to establish the importance of these songs written by little-known or anonymous balladeers and the contribution they make to our

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understanding of the radical culture of the Romantic period, despite the challenges in recovering information on contemporaneous performance and reception. Moreover, through the commentary on the songs' transformation by Coe, Peters and Smyth from the page into workable – and singable – songs, enhanced by the accompanying audio tracks, this essay illustrates the ways in which contemporary performance is mediated through older traditions of song whilst simultaneously shedding new light on Peterloo, thereby enhancing our appreciation of how these songs would have been performed and received in the taverns of Manchester and London two hundred years ago.

4. There has been some welcome attention given to song and scholarship in recent years, although, as noted above, further exploration of the role of song and performance within the radical culture of the Romantic period is warranted. In her essay “The Culture of Song,” Kirsteen McCue discusses the centrality of song to the Romantic era and the way in which it both transcends class and links to past experiences. Citing Burns and Thomas Moore as examples, McCue notes that the commercial and popular success of song sheets in the first half of the nineteenth century was due, in large part, to their consumption by both labouring and middle classes (647). The focus on the growing middle-class consumption of songs is evident in the *Romantic National Song Network*, co-produced by McCue. By defining songs as “published [...] texts with music” and providing biographies of individual songs, such as “Rule Britannia,” the project’s scope does not extend to the examination of the role of broadside ballads and song within radical, labouring-class culture. Whilst the inclusion of audio recordings is welcome, the performative element appears to be centred around how these songs would have sounded in the middle-class homes of the time.

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5. Further attention has been given to song in the recent issue of *Studies in Romanticism* entitled “Song and the City.” In the introduction, Ian Newman and Gillian Russell, in parallel with McCue, explore the significance of song, and particularly national song, in the popular culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries where its fluidity “disturb[s] spatial, political and class boundaries” (432). However, as with the *Romantic National Song Network*, the broadside ballad is excluded from their study due to its gentrification by antiquarians in the eighteenth century. Whilst it is indeed the case that antiquarians, such as Thomas Percy, and canonical poets, such as Byron, did much to divorce the ballad from vernacular culture, nevertheless, the ballad remained a cornerstone of vernacular culture in the Romantic period not only in the form of street ballads but also in radical journals which harnessed the immediacy and anonymity of the street or broadside ballad for political purposes. Despite my reservations about the decision not to include ballads in their discussion, I do share Newman and Russell’s view that more attention needs to be given to the performative nature of song, given its centrality to the soundscape of Romantic-era towns and cities.
  
6. Understandably, given the title of the journal issue, attention is paid by Newman, I.J. Corfe and Jensen to song within London and, whilst much of the commentary can be applied to other urban settings, I feel that the metropolitan focus takes attention away from the richness of song in Manchester during a time when the city was so politically and culturally significant both through its centrality to radicalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and to Chartism in the ensuing decades. Even though one of the Peterloo songs considered here was written by a London-based author, the sense of place

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is of fundamental importance and one shared by *Road to Peterloo* musician, Laura Smyth, for whom music rooted in time and place underpins her desire to pass on these songs and traditions.

7. It is this desire to “make [songs] their own and pass them on” (13) that is central to Steve Roud’s argument that “the social context of traditional singing is the key to understanding its nature” (4). In his recent publication, *Folksong in England*, Roud focusses his attention not on the songs themselves but on “who sang what, where, when and how” (4), claiming that, given the tune is “fifty percent of the definition of the song, it should at least get the same consideration as the words” (10). Whilst Roud does not include political protest songs in his work, his understanding of performance, reception and tradition are invaluable to any examination of song and vernacular culture.
  
8. Inevitably, in the study of song, tensions between print and oral culture arise. Taking Terence Allen Hoagwood’s work on “pseudo-song” as a touchstone, Erik Simpson is correct to identify the intrinsic contradiction in using print to convey orality: “the representation of the unprintable in the medium of print” (376). His argument could be applied to the widespread practice of printing songs in radical journals, whereby the communality of singing is represented through the written form. Whilst the lack of evidence regarding the performance of such songs makes it a challenge to contend that these were “real” songs, it is reasonable to assert that readers of such journals would be able to select a well-known tune to accompany the lyrics, thereby reclaiming print back into orality.

9. As noted above, I contend that the songs considered here are ephemeral texts, their existence as broadsides or in short-lived radical journals indicative of their precarious position within print culture. Including broadside ballads and newspapers within her definition, I agree with Russell that “‘ephemera’ refers to forms of print that are ubiquitous and familiar but which occupy a marginal, even buried, place in institutions and disciplinary formations,” (3) forming part of the continuum between books and miscellaneous scraps of print (13). Furthermore, in questioning the term “ephemeral” in relation to street literature, Newman and Russell argue convincingly that printed ballads and songs mediate between the oral culture of performance and print culture (439). Building on this, I maintain that, whether as broadsides, in songsters or indeed in radical journals (a medium Newman and Russell do not consider), printed songs occupy the hinterland between oral and print culture, offering tantalising glimpses into a world of performance, signifying its existence whilst simultaneously being unable to satisfactorily capture its fleetingness. This embedded memory of performance is emboldened through the inclusion of a named tune, thereby providing an aural quality often frustratingly absent when the tune is not stated.<sup>4</sup> Despite the supposed permanence of a printed text, the mere happenstance of the continued existence of broadside ballads is also a reminder of all that has been lost: illegible and missing words examples of their tenuous grasp on being. Moreover, the anonymity of so many of the writers, the loss of the original voices, performances and sometimes tunes results in a printed text which is incomplete, its meaning lessened by what is not present.



10. Unsurprisingly, there has been considerable attention given to Peterloo as part of the bicentennial commemorations in 2019 and a number of publications have enhanced knowledge about and recognition of the massacre.<sup>5</sup> In the introduction to the collection of essays *Commemorating Peterloo*, Michael Demson and Regina Hewitt define its purpose as commemorating the “ultimate triumph of the people over repressive violence” through “human resilience” which led to the Reform Act of 1832 (2). They also acknowledge the significance of cultural forms and the way in which people used them to make sense of their experiences: “while demonstrations enacted political identity, journalism, essays, poetry, novels and other forms of literature scripted it” (12). Taking the liberty of including song in their “other forms of literature,” it is evident that the cultural representations of the massacre provide us with a greater understanding of the thoughts and feelings of those present. Stephen Behrendt extends this argument, claiming that cultural artefacts “keep the participants (*victims* in particular), ‘alive’ in the collective public memory” [original emphasis] (34).

11. In a continuation of the theme of memorialisation, in his essay “The Sounds of Peterloo,” Ian Haywood defines radical protest as the “sound of the radical sublime” with radical print culture recording the voices, music and other sounds of the event on its pages, thereby providing a permanent record of the transience of sound (58). With a focus on the “agency of resistance” evoked through Handel’s “See the Conquering Hero Comes” and “Rule Britannia,” both of which were played and sung at St Peter’s Field, Haywood maintains that “listening to the sounds of Peterloo enables us to newly appreciate and re-evaluate its political and cultural impact” (69, 59). Even though Haywood does not consider at any

length the role of radical song within the Peterloo “soundtrack” (63) or the voices of those balladeers as “ear-witnesses” of the massacre beyond Samuel Bamford and Thomas Brown, the named author of *The Field of Peterloo* (59), I share his view about the significance of sound to our understanding and there would appear to be no better way to exemplify this significance and keep the event alive, as Behrendt claims, than through the performance of songs.<sup>6</sup>

## II. “A New Song. On Peterloo Meeting” / “Rise, Britons, Rise”<sup>7</sup>

12. Originally titled “A New Song. On Peterloo Meeting,” this broadside is one of the Manchester Central Library’s Collection of Ballads. As was common practice with broadside ballads, “A New Song. On Peterloo Meeting” was printed on a single sheet alongside another, entitled “A New Song”; such a generic title, according to Roud, was “one of the conventions of printed song material of the [Romantic] period” (291). Usually cut in two and sold separately by the balladmonger, these slip songs both refer to Henry “Orator” Hunt, erstwhile leader of the radical movement and the main speaker on the hustings in St Peter’s Field on 16 August 1819 (Roud and Bishop xxxix). Both songs are headed by woodcuts, neither of which has any link to the songs themselves: the woodcut accompanying “On Peterloo Meeting” is a pastoral image of two young lovers sitting under a tree; again, this practice was commonplace, evidence perhaps of the speed with which such songs were printed or the limited literacy of the printer. Woodcut illustrations, “used more or less at random” helped to sell the ballads by making them more visually appealing to buyers, who would often paste them on walls (Roud 431). The cheap, transient natures

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of the ballads would have made the commissioning of a more suitable woodcut both expensive and time consuming. Broadsides were the cheapest and easiest form of print to produce, costing as little as a halfpenny. The paper used was thin, the type used often worn and mistakes commonplace (Roud 431).

**13.** Printed alongside each of these two slip songs is a suggested tune, a usual practice for broadside ballads and one also adopted in many radical journals. As is evident with all three songs considered here, setting new words to old tunes was nothing new in the early nineteenth century and can be widely seen across both oral and print culture, as commented on by Bowan and Pickering: “new meanings were reliant on a shared knowledge of the original text and melody. Intertextuality was then at the centre of this fluid cultural practice and was often signalled by the use of music” (39). At one level, the naming of a familiar tune would ensure a song’s accessibility to both its singers and audience; to a radical balladeer, the tune becomes a weapon of subversion, adding further layers of signification.

**14.** Even though these slip songs are not dated and the printer not stated, the very explicit links to events in 1819 suggest that they were written and printed within months of the massacre. “On Peterloo Meeting” describes the massacre before focussing attention on Hunt, “that valiant hero” (21). Details of his arrest and incarceration, firstly in New Bailey Prison in Salford and then in Lancaster Gaol, are accurate and a clear indication that the balladeer was well-informed. The second song on the sheet describes Hunt’s arrival in London on September 15, 1819 as he awaited trial in York in March 1820, where he was convicted of seditious conspiracy and sentenced to two and a half years’ imprisonment. Although it is

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not known who wrote the ballads, the shared topic of Hunt and chronological narrative from the first to the second suggest they were written by the same hand or, at the very least, were intended to be read or sung together, despite being slip songs.

15. As well as Hunt, “On Peterloo Meeting” refers to Sir Charles Wolseley in the chorus:

Come my lads let’s all be true,  
And never, never, for to rue,  
Come join my lads and all be free,  
With shouts of Hunt and Wolseley. (9-12)

Described by Robert Poole as “well-meaning and diffident,” lacking the “personal presence of Hunt,” Staffordshire landowner Wolseley was also a central figure in the reform movement and one of the founders, alongside Major John Cartwright, of the Hampden Clubs (Poole *Peterloo* 218). Despite not being present at Peterloo, Wolseley was arrested in Stockport in June 1819 after giving a speech in which he advocated universal suffrage and was subsequently convicted of treason and sedition (White 180). Both this and his support of the Peterloo victims endeared him to radicals.

16. As with a number of songs written in the aftermath of the massacre, “On Peterloo Meeting” is an exhortatory ballad calling on the people to: “Rise Britons, rise now from your slumber, / Rise and hail the glorious day” (1-2). Whilst acknowledging the tragic events, the song commemorates the “heroes bleeding” (5) and regards the massacre as a catalyst for change, heralding revolution and calling on the people to “endeavour to be free” (34). The exhortatory ballad dates back to the sixteenth century and is a well-used trope in radical

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poetry and song, most famously used by Shelley in the refrain to the “Masque of Anarchy” where he exhorts the people to “rise like lions after slumber.” (372).<sup>8</sup> The similarity between the two ballads is also noted by Behrendt, who describes “On Peterloo Meeting” as “eerily prescient” of the “rousing language” of “Masque of Anarchy” (46). However, Behrendt does not go further with this comparison but instead concentrates on Shelley’s undoubtedly magnificent poem, even though it played no part in the wider cultural response to Peterloo until its publication over a decade later.

17. The broadside states the tune as “Parker’s Widow,” which, according to Roy Palmer, was written as a lament for Richard Parker who was executed in 1797 for his part in the naval mutiny at the Nore (298). Following the failure of the mutiny, Parker was arrested, court-martialled and hanged from the yardarm on his ship, HMS Sandwich. Also known as “The Death of Parker,” the original song was written and sung from the perspective of the grieving widow, Anne McHardy Parker. Demonised by the press as a dangerous revolutionary, (Hill, n.pag), Parker was considered an anti-establishment hero and, through the selection of this specific tune, the balladeer may have wished to draw links between Parker, and Hunt and Wolseley. Whilst Parker’s story is of interest and significance to “On Peterloo Meeting,” it is the role of Parker’s wife that is of more import in the subsequent reinterpretation of the song by Laura Smyth. Following her husband’s arrest, Anne McHardy Parker tirelessly campaigned to obtain a pardon for her husband, including petitioning Queen Charlotte. After Parker’s execution and having failed in her request for the body of her husband, Anne and four other women exhumed his body, taking it to a public house in London. Fearing a public funeral, the Home Office stole the body and

buried it secretly at St. Mary Matfelon Church in Whitechapel. On discovering the location, Anne successfully obtained a Christian burial (Dugan 364-9). Her extraordinary bravery in challenging the establishment would have been appealing to radicals, her success in stark contrast to the failure of her husband and an inspiring example of female agency, which, in part, inspired Smyth's interpretation.

- 18.** The Roud Index lists 163 entries for “The Death of Parker” and its variants. The large majority of entries relate to broadside ballads printed in the early to mid-nineteenth century, while nine of these entries relate to versions notated between the late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, as found in the oral tradition.<sup>9</sup> According to Smyth who researched the tune prior to working on the song, “Parker’s Widow” seems to be a variant of the morris dance tune “Constant Billy” or “Cease Your Funning,” which was used in early eighteenth-century ballad operas and was set by Beethoven in 1818.<sup>10</sup> William Chappell notes that “Cease Your Funning” appears in Gay’s *Beggars’ Opera*, first performed in 1728, although he surmises that the tune is much older (664-6). Elaine Bradtke contends that the first printed version of the song dates to 1721 when it was printed in London as a broadside under the title, “Charming Billy: A New Song” with its first publication under the title of “Constant Billy” following six years later in Playford’s *English Dancing Master* (97). Therefore, this evidence clearly indicates that “Parker’s Widow,” in various forms, had been in existence for at least a century prior to Peterloo and would have reached a wide-ranging audience during this time.

19. The longevity and widespread appeal of the song suggest that it would have been widely known in 1819 and audiences listening to “On Peterloo Meeting” would have been familiar with the tune. Mark Booth notes that a familiar tune would have been “a significant inducement to buy printed words,” as well as an aid for memorisation (112); however, the connection between the tune and the words for many radical songs is more significant than a marketing ploy. Applying Booth’s claim that “a song fulfils its potential in significant part according to what it shares with other similar good songs” (24), “On Peterloo Meeting” is dependent on not only the tune of “Parker’s Widow” but also its connotations for the full meaning to be realised through the interplay between the signifier and signified of the new song and the old.

20. Also known as “The Lamentation of Parker’s Widow” and “The Widow Parker’s Sorrowful Lamentation,” “Parker’s Widow” begins:

Ye Gods above, protect a widow  
And with pity look down on me,  
Oh, help me, help me out of trouble  
And out of sad calamity. (1-4)

Considering the fact that “On Peterloo Meeting” is a rabble-rousing exhortatory ballad, calling on the audience to “rise” (1), the selection of a lament for the tune could appear contradictory but, through listening to Laura Smyth’s version, an alternative meaning can be found, thereby endorsing Booth’s claim that, “to understand the real nature of the song we must not after all be content with the text as object but must project it into performance” (33).

21. On the process of preparing the song for performance, Smyth comments:

I suppose it's interesting that I read the lyrics first before I knew what the tune "Parker's Widow" sounded like and felt immediately that the song should be quite plaintive despite the exhortation. Perhaps the name "Parker's Widow" influenced me to think about the death from a woman's perspective in the first place.

As is commonplace in folk singing, alterations to the lyrics have been made and, alongside slight changes to render it even more sorrowful, the tune has also been slowed down, allowing Smyth to adopt a free rhythm when singing.<sup>11</sup> This practice of "fitting" new words to existing tunes has been widespread, as commented on by Palmer, who maintains that "the marriage of a tune and a text often requires minor amendments in both" (*Touch of the Times* 19). Each adaptation and indeed performance of a song creates a new version, the interplay between singer, place, time and audience forging a new meaning whilst still holding within it all previous performances.

22. Vic Gammon observes that "to make a song is to make something with the intention that it is to be performed" (12); however, despite extensive research, I have not discovered any evidence of "On Peterloo Meeting" being sung in the years following Peterloo, although locating evidence of the performance of such vernacular songs is challenging and its absence is not an indication that it was not performed. What is evident from Smyth's interpretation of the song is the transformation of meaning from text into performance, which accords with Booth's view that "where the song properly exists, where it is words for the singing voice, it has possibilities not recognised among poems for reading" (6). Hearing a female voice call on "Britons" to "Rise Now" (1) not only alludes to the agency



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of Anne McHardy Parker but also to the thousands of women who were present at Peterloo. Dressed in white, carrying banners and marching either alongside the men and children or as representatives of female reform societies, women played a central role at Peterloo. Targeted by the Manchester and Salford Yeomanry Cavalry, they were twice as likely to be killed or injured as men (Bush “Women at Peterloo” 225; Bush *Casualties* 31).<sup>12</sup> The iconography of the female about to be struck by a sabre-wielding yeoman seen in caricatures, on pottery and textiles signifies the brutality of those who were purportedly restoring law and order.<sup>13</sup> Despite the lack of specific reference to women in the song, Smyth’s haunting combination of defiance and poignancy conveyed through the purity of her singing affects the listener, foregrounding the female experience, with the result that the exhortation is less a call to arms than an imploring to the people to avenge the victims of the massacre.

23. Thomas McKean comments that the relationship between songs and the singer is both synchronic and diachronic (2-3). Applying this view to Smyth’s interpretation of “On Peterloo Meeting,” her decision to rename the song “Rise, Britons, Rise” moves it away from the specificity of Peterloo to a general invocation to awake from apathy, thereby speaking diachronically to contemporary protest songs and movements, drawing links between the campaign for democracy 200 years ago and today; this resonance is integral to Smyth’s aim for the song to “act as a kind of call to arms [to] prevent political apathy.” Whilst “Peterloo” has been removed from the title, the references to “16<sup>th</sup> day of August” (13) and “Hunt and Wolseley” (12) ensure that the song is still very much rooted in the

time it was written, its new title providing a fitting synchronous link to radical songs of the Romantic period.

### III. “Saint Ethelstone’s Day”<sup>14</sup>

24. This lively, irreverent song was published in the radical weekly *Theological and Political Comet* on November 6, 1819 where the author is stated as “A.D.” (Keen, 131).<sup>15</sup> The song is of particular significance and interest for three reasons, each of which will be explored in detail: the author, the subject and the tune. Allen Davenport, self-taught shoemaker poet and disciple of the ultra-radical Thomas Spence, was a well-known figure in radical circles and had a number of poems published in radical journals, such as the *Comet*, *Medusa* and *Sherwin’s Political Register*. The vast majority of Peterloo poems and songs are anonymous, so the fact that Davenport, as an established writer and activist, chose to write a satirical song on Peterloo is of import. The target of his sharp-tongued wit is the Reverend Charles Wickstead Ethelstone (or Ethelston), an Anglican clergyman and leading Manchester magistrate who claimed to have read the Riot Act out of a first-story window in Mount Street, on the edge of St. Peter’s Field, where the magistrates gathered to oversee events.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the tune is stated as the well-known “Gee-Up, Dobbin,” the lewdness of the original lyrics providing an engaging sub-text to Davenport’s song.

25. On his arrival in London in 1804 from a small village on the Wiltshire-Gloucestershire border, Davenport found work as a shoemaker and was soon introduced to the agrarian revolutionary ideas of Thomas Spence (Worrall 81-2). Closer to the more moderate

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Spencean Thomas Evans than the ultra-radicals such as Arthur Thistlewood, Davenport disappeared from view for a while, perhaps, as Worrall observes, to distance himself from the increasingly violent tendencies of the ultras.<sup>17</sup> His absence caused Thomas Davison, radical printer of *Medusa* and the *Comet* to ask in the October 23, 1819 edition of the *Comet*, “What is become of A.D?” (Scrivener 206: Worrall 88). Two weeks later, “Saint Ethelstone’s Day” was published.

26. Davenport was to enjoy a relatively successful and enduring career as a writer. His publications include an anthology of poems, *Kings, or, Legitimacy Unmasked* (1819), and a drama inspired by the Queen Caroline Affair, *Claremont* (1820). In later life, he became an active Chartist and published his autobiography, *Life and Literary Pursuits*, in 1845, the year prior to his death.<sup>18</sup> Described by Anne Janowitz as “a significant communitarian poet,” Davenport provides a link between Spenceans and Chartists, his life and career spanning the first half of the nineteenth century. As with his contemporary, John Clare, Davenport was brought up listening to ballads being sung by his rural labouring-class parents (Janowitz 33). Also of significance to his understanding of the power of song is the influence of Methodist hymns, tavern singing and satirical verse of the eighteenth century. It is perhaps this satirical verse and, in particular, the songs of Spence which underpin “Saint Ethelstone’s Day,” thereby supporting Janowitz’s conclusion: “Like Spence before him, Davenport aims to contribute to the naming of a self-consciously counter-hegemonic poetic tradition” (115-6).

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27. The relevance of tavern singing is worth exploring further. Worrall discusses the role of informal meetings held in London pubs in the radical culture of the early nineteenth century. Evolving from debating societies and quasi-religious chapels of the 1790s, these free-and-easies, as they were known, provided opportunities for radicals to get together to drink, toast, discuss the politics of the day and to sing. At the “apex” of this “convivial public sphere,” comments Ian Newman, were the taverns associated with the London Corresponding Society (LCS), which created “new intersections between literature, music and radicalism” (31, 8). Davenport’s experience of such gatherings at Archer Street Chapel (later Hopkins Street) debating clubs in London enabled him to hone his clear and direct style (Worrall 87-9). According to the radical turned conservative William Reid, writing in 1800, those attending the free-and-easies often sang songs “in which the clergy were a standing subject of abuse” (qtd. In Worrall 91), from which it can be inferred that Davenport’s decision to lampoon Ethelstone was part of a radical trope.

28. I share Worrall’s view that, by and large, song somehow managed to evade the authorities. Despite the infiltration of spies at the free-and-easies, singing at work or in the home escaped the tentacles of the state. As Worrall puts it, “A populace who could ‘sing their rights’ and instruct each other in song eluded surveillance in their chorus of numbers” (91). Furthermore, it could also be argued that camouflage for incendiary lyrics would be provided by familiar tunes. A government spy passing by a free-and-easy may be persuaded that the members were singing a popular ballad rather than a seditious song. Despite the challenge prosecuting performance presented to the authorities, Newman maintains that printed copies of seditious songs were inherently dangerous, with the

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authorities “unclear whether printed ballads of performed songs were more dangerous to the nation” and the state fearful that “spontaneous actions might erupt from a semi-literate mob” (181, 186). Emboldened by Peterloo, a revolution-fearing government silenced the free-and-easies with the passing of the Six Acts at the end of 1819.

**29.** Davenport’s apprenticeship both in Spencean politics and the radical public sphere of the free-and-easies underpin his poetic response to Peterloo. Even though it appears that “Saint Ethelstone’s Day” is his only literary response to the massacre and there does not appear to be evidence of it having been sung in later years, its sense of communitarianism and mischief is redolent of the raucous radical gatherings in London in the Romantic period and bring a sense of the carnival atmosphere nurtured in the free-and-easies.

**30.** Described by Poole, as “the erstwhile Eeyore of alarm,” Ethelstone had been reporting to Lord Sidmouth and the Home Office for several years prior to Peterloo. Relying on a network of trusty spies, including Peter Campbell and Samuel Fleming, Ethelstone passed on intelligence concerning radical activity gathered at meetings such as the Hampden Clubs (Poole, *Peterloo* 340; Riding 55-9). As Donald Read wryly observes, “In spite of his cloth he showed little Christian charity towards the Radical Reformers” (77). It would appear that Ethelstone was not alone in combining roles of clergyman and spymaster. George Cruikshank’s famous image of the “Clerical Magistrate” in William Hone’s *Political House that Jack Built* depicts a Janus-faced clergyman with one hand holding a crucifix and the other a noose, underscoring the hypocrisy of such men (Hone n.pag).<sup>19</sup> According to Poole, an earlier version of the caricature included the clergyman saying, “Go order the

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soldiers out to disperse them at the point of a sword (there's no occasion to read the Riot Act)," an explicit link between the Cruikshank image and Ethelstone (*Peterloo* 33).

31. As previously stated, Ethelstone's main claim to fame with regard to Peterloo is the assertion by his fellow magistrates that he read the Riot Act in his "booming baritone," thereby providing the pretext to send in the troops after the crowd failed to disperse (Riding 251). Poole and Riding both contest this version of events, arguing that the evidence is far from conclusive (Poole *Peterloo* 364-7; Riding 252). Furthermore, Poole contends that, given that the meeting was both peaceful and lawful, the reading of the Riot Act was unjustified: "the only people who rioted at Peterloo were those most loyal citizens, the special constables and the Yeomanry" (*Peterloo* 367). Whether or not the Riot Act was read is somewhat immaterial. The importance is that it was believed to have been read in order to provide justification for the violence that ensued. Ethelstone was quick to write to Lord Sidmouth, the Home Secretary, on the evening of August 16, praising the Manchester and Salford Yeomanry Cavalry in an attempt to take some control of the narrative.<sup>20</sup>

Accompanying the song in the *Comet* is the following headnote:

The following little song is from the last, new, deep and affecting tragedy, called, "The *Peterloo Massacre*," or, "SAINT ETHELSTONE'S DAY," 1819, with unbounded applause; and, it is conjectured, from the high patronage which this tragedy has met, that it will be repeated during the present season! Indeed, some are so sanguine in their expectations, that they think it probable, it may have a run during the Christmas holidays, instead of "George Barnwell!!"<sup>21</sup> But, be that as it may, I here present you

with the song, which is to the Prince's favourite tune of – "Gee-up Dobbin." (Keen 131)

The Prince Regent was widely despised during this period both for his lavish, hedonistic lifestyle and his support for the Manchester magistrates. Caricatures by Cruikshank and Gillray depict a fat, debauched figure and even his obituary in *The Times* in 1830 states: "there never was an individual less regretted by his fellow creatures than this deceased king" (qtd. in Hibbert n.pag). Davenport's selection of this song, with its bawdy lyrics, adds another layer to the satire; not only is Davenport lampooning Ethelstone in the song but also the Prince Regent.

**32.** As is common with ballad tunes, "Gee-up Dobbin" has a variety of names, including "Gee Ho Dobbin," "Laugh and Lay Down" and "Gee-Up Neddy," testament to the fluidity of vernacular culture. Chappell notes that the broadside version of "Gee Ho Dobbin" dates to 1757, and the song was also used in many collections of country dances as well as the 1762 ballad opera, *Love in a Village*, which had original music composed by Thomas Arne (Chappell 690).<sup>22</sup> Another Peterloo song, "The Peterloo Massacre," written in Lancastrian dialect by the Manchester poet and furniture dealer, Michael Wilson, states "Gee-up Dobbin" as the intended tune (Morgan *Ballads* 141-2). Over 150 years after its first publication, the tune has an entry in Frank Kidson's 1910 article, "Bygone Comic Song Tunes," evidence of its onetime significance (220-2).<sup>23</sup> According to Pete Coe, it is still well-known in the folk world as the morris dance tune, "Swaggering Boney" or "Travel by Steam."<sup>24</sup>

**33.** Chappell provides the first verse and tune for “Gee Ho Dobbin”:

As I was driving my waggon one day,  
I met a young damsel, tight, buxom and gay  
I kindly accosted her with a low bow,  
And I felt my whole body I cannot tell how:  
Gee ho, Dobbin, hi ho Dobbin  
Gee ho, Dobbin, gee up and gee ho. (691)

The woodcut accompanying an undated broadside version entitled “The Waggoner or Gee Ho Dobbin” depicts a young waggoner accosting a woman and, unlike the woodcut accompanying “On Peterloo Meeting,” was clearly either designed or selected to represent the song, perhaps an indication that a bawdy song was more commercially viable than a political one.<sup>25</sup>

**34.** The suggestive lyrics detailing the liaison between the aptly named Roger and the innocent Jenny become more explicit over the ensuing seven verses, as exemplified by the fifth verse:

Then down in my waggon this damsel I laid;  
But still, I kept driving, for driving’s my trade:  
I rumpl’d her feathers and tickl’d her scutt  
And play’d the round rubbers at two-handed put. (232)

Davenport’s link between this song and the Prince Regent may have been influenced by Cruikshank’s 1812 caricature, *An Excursion to Ragley Hall*, which depicts the Prince Regent seducing his long-standing mistress, the Marchioness of Hertford, in a carriage



being driven by the devil with the cuckolded Marquis riding a donkey (Wardroper 37-8, 51).<sup>26</sup> Davenport's brazen link between such shocking lyrics and the Prince Regent is cleverly obscured by the indirect reference, reliant upon the readers' or listeners' understanding; its object, as Scrivener so aptly notes of "reformist" comic verse, is "not to persuade but to delight," which it undoubtedly achieves (25).

**35.** Due to Davenport's renown within both Spencean and Chartist radicalism, "Saint Ethelstone's Day" has received some attention from scholars. Scrivener includes it along with three other Davenport poems in his anthology of Romantic-era radical verse, *Poetry and Reform*, commenting that "the fifth stanza's highly charged sexual imagery is congruent with the popular reaction to Peterloo" (225). In his article "The Poetry of Peterloo," in which he claims to have identified thirty "original items" of Peterloo poetry, Jim Clayson concludes, "[Davenport] said little that was new but the verses are among the best productions of the genre" (31, 36). It is not clear from the article whether Clayson is referring to the genre of satire or Peterloo verse. Finally, in her detailed examination of Davenport's contribution to radical culture, Janowitz claims that the song "belong[s] to the robust strain of political stanzas and satirical choric songs of the vivid years of the 1790s" (125). Even passing comments such as these are unusual in regard to Peterloo verse and are therefore worthy of note; however, none of the scholars mentioned above considers how "Saint Ethelstone's Day" would have been sung. Its performativity through the combination of satirical lyrics and crowd-pleasing tune do suggest that Davenport's apprenticeship at Hopkins Street Chapel was not wasted. The anapaestic tetrameters and rhyming couplets, so intrinsic to oral culture, provide a jauntiness which belies the ferocity

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of the satire. Pete Coe's version of the song brings to life its carnivalesque irreverence, encouraging communal singing on the final line of each verse whilst never losing sight of its caustic invective. Coe comments:

This was an essential song to include, with the targeted, barbed description set to popular melody, all the elements of a pub sing-around or later music hall patter song with a refrain. So that's the way I performed it, more ham live, than on the CD. A bit of a challenge for Brian [Peters] to chase my phrasing as it was different every night (never the same way once). Allen Davenport obviously knew that using a popular tune & including a refrain was an effective way of performing with an audience.

**36.** In six unrelenting balladic quatrains, Davenport unleashes his disdain for the hypocrisy of Ethelstone, whose Christianity does not get in the way of his bloodlust as well as his desire for fame. The attention to detail in the gruesome descriptions of the injuries inflicted by the "yeomanry Butchers" (15) who ended the day "drunken with blood" (20) suggests that Davenport was well-informed about events of the day, albeit from the pages of radical journals rather than the streets of Manchester.

**37.** Perhaps it is unsurprising that satire is one of the most common genres found in the Peterloo poems where humour is combined with what Scrivener defines as "cultural defiance" (25). For contemporaneous audiences familiar with the lewd "Gee Up Dobbin," the wit of Davenport's song would have been welcomed with the clever word play highlighting the coarseness of the original. Scrivener's comment above regarding the sexual imagery of the fifth stanza in which the yeomanry "hack'd off the breasts of women" (17) references not

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only the very real targeting of women by the Manchester and Salford Yeomanry Cavalry, as discussed earlier, but also draws parallels with the playfulness of the sexual imagery in the original song, although post #MeToo, one cannot help but regard the lascivious Roger as a sexual predator rather than a harmless and hapless seducer. Even though these allusions and additional layers of meaning would not be understood by a modern audience, in the tradition of folk music, prior to the live performance, Coe offers some contextual information to the song, thereby providing audiences with a lens through which to look at and listen to songs across time and space, as commented on by Jensen (545). Coe's interpretation foregrounds the wit and playfulness of Davenport's creation whilst ensuring that the sharp-edged invective and message about the immorality of the clergy remain.

#### **IV. "Peterloo" / "John Stafford's Song"<sup>27</sup>**

**38.** The final song to be considered is in the form of a traditional narrative ballad, recalling detailed eye-witness events of the massacre. It is written by John Stafford, a spinner from Charlestown, near Ashton-under-Lyne in Lancashire, several of whose family attended the meeting at St. Peter's Field to hear Henry "Orator" Hunt, although Stafford himself turned back on being warned of the carnage.<sup>28</sup> What distinguishes Stafford's song from the others considered here is both the attention to detail and its longevity with examples of it being sung on numerous occasions by Chartists as part of the ritualised commemorations of Hunt's birthday in the 1830s and 1840s.<sup>29</sup> Its function is therefore two-fold: to both record and memorialise the massacre.

39. As well as “Peterloo,” Stafford also wrote the prosaically titled, “Another Song Concerning Peterloo,” in Lancashire dialect, which appears to be Stafford’s eye-witness account of the day when he and his father encountered those fleeing the bloodshed.<sup>30</sup> Despite the differences in style of the two songs, they are both firmly rooted in time and place, thereby providing them with an authority and authenticity that Davenport’s song, written from a distance employing second-hand reports, cannot emulate. Like Davenport, despite his illiteracy, Stafford became an established poet, albeit in local, radical circles and both of his Peterloo songs were published in his 1840 work, *Songs Comic and Sentimental* (Palmer *Sound* 331). According to James Epstein, Stafford contributed to the column, “National Songs,” in the *Manchester Observer* in October 1819, and he goes on to note that Stafford would sing his songs at radical dinners and meetings (219, 154).<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the Chartist newspaper, the *Northern Star*, reports in its issue published on November 16, 1839 that, “although Stafford never had the opportunity of learning to either to read or write, [he] has composed songs that would do honour to a Southey” (“Leeds and West Riding News” 1839 5). Six years later, in 1845, the *Northern Star* records Stafford singing “Henry’s Ghost” in reference to the commemoration of Hunt’s birthday, whilst “Peterloo” was sung by a Mr William Seel (“Commemoration” 15).<sup>32</sup> A similar event in 1849 included the “song, ‘Peterloo’ by John Stafford, the Charlestown poet, being one of his own compositions, after having been at the Peterloo Massacre” (“Hunt’s Birthday” 10). This evidence indicates that, his illiteracy notwithstanding, Stafford was a significant figure in Ashton for several decades both for his radicalism and his apparent talents as a poet and balladeer.<sup>33</sup>

40. Palmer claims that “Peterloo” was to be sung to the tune of “Green on the Cape,” an Irish rebel song dating to 1802 (*Sound* 331). As with both of the other tunes studied here, the provenance of this tune is more complex. It would appear to be “The Tulip” written by James Oswald which forms the first part of no. 12 in his 1747 composition, *Airs for the Spring*. Again, as with both “Gee Up Dobbin” and “Parker’s Widow,” “The Tulip” also features in the theatre, in the comic opera, *The Reprisal*, in 1757 (“British Lamentation”), and it was adapted as the morris tune, “Lads A Bunchum.” However, despite its earlier incarnations, what is of most interest in relation to Stafford’s song are the links between the tune and Irish nationalism.

41. Printed alongside two other Irish rebel songs, the undated broadside version of this “much admired song” begins:

I’m a lad that’s forced in exile from my native land,

For an oath has pass’d against me, in my country I can’t stand

But while I’m at my liberty, I will make my escape,

I’m a poor distressed Croppy, for the green on the cape. (*Green Upon the Cape* 1-4)<sup>34</sup>

This all begs the question as to why Stafford chose this tune for his song. The companion piece to “Peterloo,” “Another Song Concerning Peterloo” states its accompanying tune as “Joan O’Greenfield,” written by Joseph Lees from Oldham in 1805 and described by Poole as “the most successful of all Lancashire songs” (Palmer *Sound of History* 260; Poole “March” 133).<sup>35</sup> Written in local dialect and widely known, the selection of this tune by Stafford for his song helps anchor it to a place and social class, thereby facilitating its appeal and accessibility to its intended audience. Whether Stafford’s fellow Lancastrians

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would have been familiar with an Irish rebel song is unknown; however, the Irish had been emigrating to Manchester in relatively high numbers for some time, and Alan Booth notes that there were approximately 10,000 Irish people in Manchester by 1800, with areas such as Ancoats and Smedley Cottage having a significant number of Irish inhabitants (68). Furthermore, Ó Catháin records that ninety-seven of the Peterloo casualties were of Irish extraction (28).

42. In her examination of the relationship between English and Irish popular culture through the lens of specific songs, I.J. Corfe argues that:

The Irish nationalist cause had been associated with English radicalism in the 1790s, but the association only became explicit in English street song, when, with the rise of Chartism, political awareness and participation became more mainstream in the population as a whole. (506)

Whilst I would agree that these explicit links are more evident in Chartism, with songs such as “My Emmet’s No More” and “Exile of Erin” – a regular feature of Chartist dinners in Manchester (“Chartist Intelligence 16; “*Hunt’s Birthday* 10), the number of links between Irish and English radicalism in the Peterloo songs, whether through the selection of the tune, as seen here with John Stafford’s song, or the references to Ireland in the lyrics, goes some way to establishing these connections two decades prior to the rise of Chartism. The references in both the Peterloo poems and radical newspapers to Irish radicalism, the failed 1798 and 1803 uprisings together with Napoleon’s plans to invade England in 1803 all provided grist to the radical mill in England during the Romantic period. As a political activist, it can be assumed that, in accordance with Bowan and Pickering’s observations

that “melodic choices were often taken with great deliberation to evoke particular pasts; to connect the causes of the present to the struggles of the past” (17), Stafford was consciously linking the English and Irish experiences of subjugation at the hands of a tyrannical government in his selection of an Irish rebel tune for a song about Peterloo.<sup>36</sup>

43. It is this evocation of the past in performances of “Peterloo” that may also be of significance for Chartists. During the 1830s and 1840s, Ashton was a notable Chartist town. In his research into the leadership, Robert G. Hall claims that Ashton “was among the most militant centres of Chartist support in the cotton district, one of the industrial strongholds of the movement” (180) and Stafford was one of the sixty-five Chartist leaders in Ashton (“Chartism in Ashton”). The *Northern Star* reports the singing of Stafford’s Peterloo in 1838, 1839, 1847 and 1849 at the commemorations of Hunt’s birthday in the middle of November, evidence of it forming part of the ritualisation of such meetings where there were speeches, toasts, reading and songs (“Leeds and West Riding News” 1838 5; “Leeds and West Riding News” 1839 5; “Chartist Intelligence” 16; “Hunt’s Birthday” 10). Bowan and Pickering contend that those attending these dinners would understand the history of the songs and the parodying of the originals, citing “With Henry Hunt We’ll Go” as a parody of “With Wellington We’ll Go” as an example of this practice (216).<sup>37</sup> Whilst “Peterloo” is not a parody of “Green Upon the Cape,” it does harness its meaning, as has been shown above with the relationship between the songs and original tunes of the other two songs discussed in this essay. The fact that the leader of the Chartists and founder of the *Northern Star*, Feargus O’Connor, was Irish only serves to highlight that connection.

44. The ritualisation apparent at these dinners to commemorate Hunt's birthday was built on both the tavern and chapel meetings of the 1790s as outlined by Worrall and Newman (and explored above) and the debating clubs, such as the regional Hampden Clubs in the 1810s. These highly performative meetings quickly established traditions, explicitly linking the 1790s and the 1810s through their activities. As Epstein observes, "ritual performance allows people to enact – to define by means of social drama – certain roles and meanings" (150). In a parallel with the London free-and-easies which influenced Davenport, the Chartist meetings each November to mark Hunt's birthday constitute a plebeian public sphere, rivalling the Church and King clubs founded by middle-class Protestants in Manchester in the 1790s (Navickas 46-7), demonstrating that the sociability and conviviality of the metropolitan tavern culture explored by Newman was very much alive and well in mid-nineteenth century Manchester. Commenting on the 1839 Chartist meeting, the unnamed journalist notes:

A more convivial night was never spent by Aristocrats; the speeches were all of the first order, and would have made Whigs and Tories blush to hear such eloquence from those they call ignorant. ("Leeds and West Riding News" 5)

45. Held either at pubs or private houses, the Chartist meetings provided Peterloo veterans with an opportunity to commemorate the massacre, ensuring that its significance was not lost on subsequent generations of radicals. The 1838 dinner in Ashton was held at the home of John and Nancy Clayton; John had been injured at Peterloo. The following year, the gathering took place at the house of a Mr Walker, "the woman of the house is one of those who was wounded by a sabre on the blood-stained field of St Peter" ("Leeds and West



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Riding News” 1838 5; “Leeds and West Riding News” 1839 5). In the space created by a lack of official memorial or means to commemorate the dead and injured, these dinners fulfilled that role in a quasi-religious ceremony with singing at its core.

46. When John Stafford sang his song at radical dinners, it would have taken some time. Comprising fifteen quatrains and no chorus, it is a song that requires listeners rather than participants. In an adaptation of an alexandrine form, the song combines the commonly used iambic heptameter with the traditional *aabb* rhyme scheme.<sup>38</sup> In his version of the song, Brian Peters has replaced John Stafford’s suggested melody with one he composed himself, based on two generic folk song tunes dating back to the nineteenth century and edited the original fifteen verses down to nine through a process of amalgamation and excision, while retaining as much as possible of the original phraseology. Peters makes no apology for the changes:

My priority as a performer in the twenty-first century is not to re-enact a piece in period style from two hundred years ago; it is to present it in a form that will appeal to the audience I perform to. Ever since the early days of the folk song revival in the 1960s, when Ewan MacColl and A. L. Lloyd set the precedent of taking considerable editorial liberties with traditional material, it has been common practice in our field to adapt both texts and tunes to render them more accessible. I tried singing Stafford’s verses to “Green on the Cape” but found it too lilting and light-hearted in feel to match the weight of the story. Although there is no strict correlation in nineteenth century vernacular song between tragic themes and doleful melodies, in the present day there is an expectation of exactly that. Using a melody in the mixolydian mode, common

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enough in English tradition and possessing the flattened seventh note also found in blues music, gave the song an edgier feel, suggesting conflict and stress. In terms of the text, I was driven by the pressure of time: to have sung all of Stafford's original verses, even to an up-tempo rhythm, would have made the song nearly six minutes long, and I judged that excessive in the context of the show.<sup>39</sup>

47. The resulting three-and-a-half-minute song, entitled "John Stafford's Song," still retains the narrative form of the original. Whilst it may be posited that the changes made remove the song too far from Stafford's original, Peters makes a convincing case for the changes and places him firmly within the tradition of "ploughboys, milkmaids, miners and weavers" who, according to Roud, "took hold of [existing songs], to make them their own and pass them on" (13). The fast-paced, toe-tapping tune emphasises the iambic rhythm and adds pace to the story, evoking both the marching feet of the protestors and the speed at which events occurred; furthermore, the use of three alternating single voices moves it beyond a single eye-witness account to a collective experience.

48. The song begins marking the day, "On the sixteenth day of August, it was held at Peterloo" (1), in an age-old ballad tradition. As the narrative moves through events on the day, it shifts from the general, "The patriots joined hand in hand, the band did sweetly play" (14) to the specific as it focusses on the experience of "an old woman" (45) who encounters a member of the Manchester and Salford Yeomanry Cavalry whom she has known since a child:

This old woman spoke right kindly, and she call'd him by his name,

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I know you will not hurt me, Thomas Shelberdine, she said,

But to fulfil his orders like the rest of that same crew,

He cut her down that instant as they did at Peterloo. (49-52)

This naming of the assailant is highly unusual and, one assumes, Stafford was secure in his knowledge. Poole, Marlow and Bush all refer to a yeoman, Thomas Shelmerdine, who attached Margaret Goodwin, a widow in her sixties from Salford who went to St Peter's Field to look for her son (Poole *Peterloo* 318; Marlow 141; Bush "Women at Peterloo" 227). Coming across the man she had nursed as a child, she pleaded with him not to hurt her but she was "deliberately ridden down and then cut on the head by Shelmerdine" (Bush "Women at Peterloo" 227). The very personal nature of this encounter stresses the fact that many assailants were known to their victims, thereby rendering the violence even more shocking.<sup>40</sup> Although Stafford does not name the woman in his song, the name of the brutal yeoman would have lived on in performances of the song many years later.

## **V. Conclusion**

**49.** In his evocation of the sounds of Peterloo, Haywood describes song as emerging from the: saturnalian, carnivalesque subculture of the radical "free and easy" in which patriotic songs and tunes were "remastered" or "sampled" (in today's musical parlance) as part of the radical songbook – that repertoire of satirical musical forms which included songs, toasts, sentiments and curses (69).

Whilst satire is indeed a key genre of radical songs, it is by no means the only one; the Peterloo songbook is astonishing in its eclecticism and the three songs considered in this

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essay provide a glimpse into that repertoire. As well as providing commentary on the events of the day and aftermath, these songs form a significant part of the radical culture of the long nineteenth century: “from the Spenceans to Burdett’s Whigs and before, music and music-making had been an integral part of the performance of politics” (Bowen and Pickering 67-8). Seizing on the power of song to (largely) avoid the attention of the authorities and harness the potency of mass appeal, Bowen and Pickering maintain that “singing was a highly efficient form of communication and it quickly became a central component of radicalism’s rituals and commemoration” (38). This is particularly evident with Stafford’s “Peterloo,” and the links to the ritualisation of Chartism warrant further attention; however, despite the lack of evidence of the other two songs considered here being performed, the work of Coe, Peters and Smyth brings them back to life, thereby providing modern audiences with a glimpse into the lives and culture of 1819. Through the consideration of the tunes – both past and present – and the performativity of these three songs, this essay has gone some way to exploring “how the subaltern [...] sang.” (McLane 11). As Peters observes, the priority of the performers is not a historical re-enactment of these songs where the original is preserved intact but, following the tradition of folk singers across the centuries, a reimagining of the song for today’s audience without losing sight of its integrity. Ong observes that “in an oral culture, knowledge once acquired had to be constantly repeated or it would be lost” (24). *The Road to Peterloo* project has ensured that the knowledge shared in these songs is not lost and their place within the radical culture of two hundred years ago as well as our own is assured.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Road to Peterloo*, <https://theroadtopeterloo.com> [accessed November 22, 2020]. As well as a CD, *The Road to Peterloo* undertook a national tour of performances during 2019. A series of joint performances between Morgan, Coe, Peters and Smyth took place in various venues in the north-west as part of the bicentennial commemorations of Peterloo in 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Although it is common practice to place the titles of broadside ballads in italics, I have decided to place all song titles in quotation marks to avoid confusion for the reader.

<sup>3</sup> The three songs are available online:

<https://owncloud.ecrituresnumeriques.ca/index.php/s/YSgYXr1xensiVXC>

<sup>4</sup> It is sometimes possible to identify the intended tune for a song if some of the lyrics are clearly based on the original.

<sup>5</sup> *Peterloo: The English Uprising* by Robert Poole and *Peterloo: The Story of a Massacre* by Jacqueline Riding are examples of recent books on the massacre.

<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that Haywood does not mention the two Peterloo songs written to the tune of “See the Conquering Hero Comes” (Morgan *Ballads* 80-1, 199-200).

<sup>7</sup> This section was written with the help of Laura Smyth.

<sup>8</sup> See Morgan for further information on the exhortatory ballad (*Ballads* 40-45).

<sup>9</sup> The Roud Index, collated by Steve Roud, comprises a database of thousands of folk songs and broadsides and is hosted on the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library website. “The Death of Parker” has been assigned the Roud number 1032, which identifies variants of this song under different titles (“Death of Parker”).

<sup>10</sup> “Cease your Funning” is included in Beethoven’s 1818 collection, *Twelve Scottish Songs* (WoO 156).

His handling of the song is mentioned by Cooper in *Beethoven’s Folksong Settings* (58).

<sup>11</sup> The traditional version of “Constant Billy” can be accessed here:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCkh8XarxNw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCkh8XarxNw). Accessed December 21, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> See Morgan, “Starving Mothers” 65-78 and Morgan, *Ballads* 93-102 for further information on women at Peterloo.

<sup>13</sup> Some of these images can be seen on the British Library website: <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-peterloo-massacre>.

<sup>14</sup> This section was written with the help of Pete Coe.

<sup>15</sup> The *Comet* only ran for seventeen issues between July and November 1819. It was published by Thomas Davison and edited by Robert Shorter (Morgan *Ballads* 22-3).

<sup>16</sup> The house belonged to a Mr Buxton, a constable (Riding 224).

<sup>17</sup> Arthur Thistlewood was executed in 1820 for his role in the Cato Street Conspiracy.

<sup>18</sup> Davenport’s 1827 collection of poems, *The Muse’s Wreath*, does not contain “Saint Ethelstone’s Day.”

<sup>19</sup> The image can be seen at: <http://romantic-circles.org/editions/hone/clertext.htm>, Accessed December 21, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Rather surprisingly, Ethelstone was a poet and his collection, *The Suicide and Other Poems*, was published in 1803 (Riding, p. 41).

<sup>21</sup> The ballad of “George Barnwell” appears in the third volume of Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. The headnote to the poem states:

The subject of this ballad is sufficiently popular from the modern play which is founded upon it.

This was written by George Lillo, a jeweller of London, and first acted about 1730. As for the ballad it was printed at least as early as the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century...The tune of “The Merchant.” This tragical narrative seems to relate to a real fact; but when it happened I have not been able to discover. (256)

The play enjoyed success into the nineteenth century and was traditionally performed on December 27, which was a holiday for apprentices (Steffensen, para. 6).

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Arne wrote the tune for “Rule Britannia” and a new arrangement for “God Save the King” in 1745 (Morgan ““God Save Our Queen!”” 60-72). Kirsteen McCue also considers “Rule Britannia” on the *Romantic National Song Network*.

<sup>23</sup> The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library archives contain numerous copies of the song from the nineteenth century.

<sup>24</sup> “Swaggering Boney” or “Travel by Steam” was collected by Cecil Sharp in 1907, indicative of its continued popularity.

<sup>25</sup> This broadside version comprises a very large woodcut, followed by the lyrics printed in a cursive font.

<sup>26</sup> Ragley Hall is mentioned in another Peterloo song, *Address to the Prince Regent* (Morgan, *Ballads* 45-6).

<sup>27</sup> This section was written with the help of Brian Peters.

<sup>28</sup> Stafford’s siblings, Samuel and William are listed among the injured (Stafford 3).

<sup>29</sup> Hunt died in 1835.

<sup>30</sup> We are grateful to Keith Stafford, a descendant of John Stafford, for sharing the full version of “Another Song on Peterloo” which comprises fifteen stanzas (Stafford 10-13). The version in Morgan (*Ballads* 110-11) has only two stanzas.

<sup>31</sup> Morgan contains two of these “National songs” from the 23 October edition of the *Manchester Observer*, where the author is stated to be a “Minstrel of the British People” (*Ballads* 80-2); Bowan and Pickering also comment that Stafford would sing his songs at radical dinners (215). Whilst beyond the scope of this essay, the battle over national identity in this period is a key tenet of radicalism. The *Romantic National Song Network* provides valuable insight into this debate across all four nations.

<sup>32</sup> It is not known whether “Henry’s Ghost” is one of Stafford’s compositions.

<sup>33</sup> According to Keith Stafford, John Stafford would compose his songs in his head and then recite them to a sympathetic radical printer (3).

<sup>34</sup> The printer is not stated in this version of the song (“Green Upon the Cape”). The tune is no. 5773 in the Roud Index. “Croppy” is the name given to the Irish rebels involved in the 1798 uprising who cut their hair short in order to emulate the French revolutionaries.

<sup>35</sup> *Road to Peterloo* contains a version of this song, “Jone O’Grinfield” (Coe *et al.*).

<sup>36</sup> Poems such as the satirical “Paddy Bull’s Epistle to his Brother John” published in *Medusa* in December 1819 exemplify the links between English and Irish radicalism at this time (Morgan, *Ballads* 174-7).

<sup>37</sup> See Morgan, *Ballads* 210-11.

<sup>38</sup> A typical alexandrine has twelve syllables, and its meter is iambic hexameter. Brian Peters notes that, while the meter is unusual for a written text, it is more usual for song.

<sup>39</sup> Peters’ actual sources were “Captain Ward and the Rainbow,” a broadside ballad dating back to the seventeenth century (“Captain Ward”) and “Texas Rangers,” an American ballad (“Texas Rangers”).

<sup>40</sup> Samuel Bamford reports a similar account of an assailant being known to his victim:

She asked who did it, and Tom [Redford] mentioned a person; he said he knew him well; and she, sobbing, said she also knew him, and his father and mother before him; and she prayed God not to visit that sin on the head of him who did it, but to change his heart and bring him to repentance. (215)